



Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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Aquatic Warbler

by Richard Grimmett

Similar in plumage to the Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, but with a striking black and creamy-yellow crown, the Aquatic Warbler *A. paludicola* is Europe's most threatened migratory passerine. The species is described as rare in the USSR, whilst in Poland, East Germany and Hungary there has been a marked decline in numbers. In Poland there are possibly 3,000-4,000 pairs, the Hungarian population could be as low as 200 pairs, and the East German population is estimated at 30-40 pairs. Elsewhere in Europe (France, Belgium, Netherlands, West Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia) the species is now either extinct, has bred only very occasionally, or its current status is unknown. The cause of its decline appears to be habitat loss on the breeding grounds, where its requirements seem to be rather specialised.

The data-gathering undertaken for the Important Birds Areas Project by ICBP/IWRB coordinators in Poland, East Ger-

many and Hungary has drawn attention to the most important sites for the species (there is an urgent need to identify the most important Soviet sites). In Poland, the Chełm Marshes (300-350 pairs), Białobłoty Marshes (200 pairs), and the vast sedge-fens of the Biebrza Marshes (southern, central, and northern basins) (1,000 pairs) are of critical importance, and these sites still require adequate protection. In East Germany, the



Aquatic Warbler. Drawing by N. Arlott taken, as are most of the illustrations in this issue, from Important bird areas in Europe.

Oder valley near Schwedt is the main site, whilst in Hungary the Hortobágy is the species's stronghold.

The species's migration route is now much better known due to intensive ringing activities over the last 20 years. In autumn, it migrates west and south-west to reach staging sites in the Netherlands, southern Britain, and north-west France. Thus, its regular occurrence at certain sites (e.g. Radipole Lake, Dorset; Marazion Marsh, Cornwall; Marais de la Baie d'Audierne, Brittany) is not a result of displacement or reverse migration as was previously thought, and these sites should now be regarded as being of conservation value for this species, as should the main stop-over sites in Portugal and Morocco. In spring, the migration route is less well-known, although a more direct route is believed to be taken. The winter quarters, from which there are very few records, presumably lie in West Africa, south of the Sahara (Mali and Senegal).

ICBP is grateful to the editors of The birds of the western Palearctic for providing an early draft for the species, which has formed the basis of this account.

ARUBA: TOURISM VERSUS SEABIRDS?

by Ruud van Halewijn

Six Caribbean islands will remain part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands until at least the end of the century. Five of these comprise the Netherlands Antilles; the sixth, Aruba, has had separate status since 1985. Despite its extreme aridity, relatively high population density (65,000 on 193 km²) and recent large-scale development for tourism, Aruba still harbours a valuable and interesting avifauna. However, the fate of the island's four aquatic bird colonies, including its sole Ramsar wetland, hangs in the balance. All are located close to Aruba's lee shoreline, sections of which are currently being developed for tourism. Another site, a Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* colony in mangroves, was lost to local recreational development in 1987. Further development of tourism has had the highest priority in Aruba's economic policy since 1985; since then, the number of tourists visiting the island has increased annually by 20-30% to 278,000 in 1988.

Conservationists in Aruba and Holland are particularly concerned about the fate of a major seabird breeding site on four small cays near the island's south-east tip. These cays harbour the largest known colony (c.3,000 pairs in recent years) of the uncommon and local Cayenne Tern *Sterna s. eurygnatha*. Seven other seabirds also breed there each year, including Roseate and Common Terns *S. dougallii*, *S. hirundo*. Harassment of these seabird colonies by

local fishermen collecting eggs and by recreational boaters increased markedly in the course of the 1970s. In 1984, a joint Aruban-Dutch long-term conservation programme, endorsed by ICBP, was initiated. Using Dutch and Aruban funds, it includes active wardening, posting of warning signs, and education through the local media. Yearly censuses show that, under protection, the population size of four of the eight breeding species has grown, most notably that of the Sooty Tern *S. fuscata*; (c.400 nests in 1984; c.2,200 in 1988). The breeding population of the Cayenne Tern has remained approximately stable over these five years, and it is thought that increased predation on eggs and small chicks, mainly by Laughing Gulls *Larus atricilla*, prevents growth of this tern's breeding population.

In the conservation programme's educational activities, it is invariably emphasised that the cays harbour a seabird breeding population of regional (Caribbean) value, and that these ground-nesting terns are vulnerable not only to human interference but to bird predation and kleptoparasitism, oil pollution, insolation and heat during midday hours, starvation, and disease (e.g. botulism affecting some of the species).

Under continued protection, prospects are good for this seabird colony, probably the most important anywhere in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Royal Tern *S. maxima* and Black Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* are considered potential colonists of the cays. In the past three

breeding seasons (late April-early August) the warden has guided many excursions to the cays for small parties of Arubans, without causing undue harm to the breeding seabirds, indicating that with strict regulations the seabird cays could be managed as a tourist attraction. However, this potential may itself be sacrificed to further developments for tourism and recreation. An area along Aruba's "mainland" shoreline directly opposite the seabird cays is a serious candidate for construction of a large tourist resort. Pending the final outcome of negotiations between the Government of Aruba and Exxon Corporation (still concessionaire of this section of the island), a detailed development plan for the area has yet to be drafted, but it seems likely that the plan will include the seabird cays (e.g. construction of recreational facilities).

The local conservation organisation, FANAPA, has initiated action to have the four small cays officially declared a seabird sanctuary as soon as possible. FANAPA has sought assistance outside Aruba, and recently contacted the Government of Aruba and Exxon with letters of support received from the ICBP Secretariat, the Dutch and Pan American Sections, the Seabird Specialist Group, HRH Prince Bernhard and Professor Karel Voous. Such letters are still welcome - please write to the Chairman of FANAPA, Mr. T. C. M. Schouten, Piedra Plat 72 A, Aruba.

Ruud van Halewijn has been involved in a seabird conservation programme in Aruba for five years.

30TH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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EDITORIAL

Birdwatchers Society of Andhra Pradesh. Seminar on Role of Birds in the Environment and their Conservation, at Hyderabad- 7th-8th February 1990,

I was sorry to have missed this meeting but the abstracts of the papers suggest that much useful discussion must have taken place. In a paper by Dr. H.S.A. Yahya, Centre of Wildlife and Ornithology, A.M.U., Aligarh 202 002, it is suggested that crows are "helpful for the crop as they frequently hunt insects in the surroundings". Siraj A. Taher, of the B.S.A.P., speaking about conservation in general regrets that "conservation action incurs people's antipathy". He argues that reasonable alternatives should be provided where possible. U. Vijaya Kumar and B.C. Chowdhury of the A.P. Mugger Project being handled by the Wildlife Institute of India, New Forest, Dehra Dun 248006, studied the population of waterfowl in Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary. They recorded 73 species belonging to 19 Families. They were able to study the habitat utilization of different species. Some prefer open water; some feed on submerged vegetation while others on grasses and plants which emerge above the water. These studies are very useful for the creation of new sanctuaries for we should know what species of vegetation we should plant for the birds involved.

An interesting paper was presented by S. Sridhar and R.S. Harve, No.10 Sirur Park 'B' Street, Seshadripuram, Bangalore 560 020, on symbiosis and nesting competition between Blackbacked Woodpeckers, Indian Rollers and Roseringed Parakeets. On a coconut tree "there were eleven nest holes in a row" made by the Woodpeckers. Most of these were occupied by the Parakeets. In return the Parakeets were seen collectively attacking and warding off a rat snake, which tried to climb the coconut tree once.

Kolleru Lake in Krishna District of A.P. "is the largest fresh water lake in India", with a water spread of 346 sq. km. It was famous for its pelicans some decades ago, but these birds have now disappeared. Merab Johnson and others of the Dept. of Zoology, Osmania University, Hyderabad 500 007, observed about 8000 pairs of Openbilled Storks between December 1987 to May 1988. But the lake suffers from a variety of disturbances which needs to be checked.

B.D. Rana and Nisha Kashyap of the Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur, discuss the breeding success of House Sparrows and Ring Doves in various seasons and conclude that during the monsoon fledgling success is higher than in spring and summer. Indra Kumar Sharma, Bhagwati Bhavan, Ratanada Road, Jodhpur 342 020, argues that the unchecked conversion of grasslands into

agriculture have adversely affected bustards, quails, partridges and sandgrouse. "Excessive use of pesticides by farmers has badly effected health and breeding of birds in and around agricultural farms". In another paper the author refers to the pollination of flowers and seed dispersal through the agency of birds. In the dry areas the trees concerned are *Tecomella undulate*, *Prosopis cineraria*, *Capparis aphylla* and *Calotropis procera*.

There were other papers presented to which I will refer in another issue.

Asian Crane Congress at Rajkot, 27th-29th December 1989

Another meeting which I missed was the Asian Crane Congress at Rajkot on 27-29th December 1989. Reports suggest that it was a splendid gathering of both men and birds. Birds bring nations together and it was cheering to find participants from Pakistan who are as interested as we are in these elegant birds.

Among the many worthwhile papers presented at the Congress, Prakash Gole's on the Status and Ecological Requirements of Sarus Crane, deserves special mention. This study has been sponsored by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, and apparently Phase I has been completed. The distribution of this species has been mapped over 45 locations in our country and two in Bangladesh. Comparisons have also been made between the past and present range of the Sarus Cranes. The information suggests that there have been local extinctions in many areas in recent decades. Describing the Activity Pattern of the birds the author says: "For Sarus families the day began with feeding in marshy areas, while most of the pairs without chicks went to fields for food..... In a typical Sarus day of 14 hours (6 a.m. to 8 p.m.) 58% of the time was devoted to feeding, 25% to resting and the remaining to social activities". The ideal habitat combination for Sarus appears to be marshes, ponds, fallow lands and cultivation in that order. Detailed counts were made in the localities visited and the conclusion is that the "Sarus seems to be numerous in the so called backward areas of the country". The threats to the future are "modernisation of agriculture leading to uniformity of habitat, reclamation of wetlands In Orissa and South Bihar, the tribals are hunter gatherers and will shoot any wild bird and animal. Such tribes reside in certain parts of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Hunting might have been responsible for the disappearance of Sarus from these areas. Maintenance of wetlands and well watered areas.... are the prime factors that will decide the future of this magnificent avian". Incidentally our largest flying bird.

With regard to crane conservation in Pakistan, the paper presented by Inayat Ullah Chaudhry says: "Three crane species, Common Crane, Demoiselle Crane and Siberian Crane rest in Pakistani territory during spring and autumn migrations. According to rough estimates Demoiselle and Common Crane population has declined to 30% of what it was 40 years ago. However these two species are not endangered."

I hope to publish some of the papers presented in subsequent issues of our Newsletter. They contain interesting facts about this eye catching family.

Wetland Ecology and Management Seminar at Bharatpur, 23rd - 25th February 1990

A seminar which I did attend was on Wetland Ecology and Management at the Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, between 23-25th February. This was a major effort by the B.N.H.S. in association with the Ministry of Environment, the Rajasthan Forest Department, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Ramsar Convention Bureau. It was a very well organised and enjoyable affair and many valuable presentations were made. I will write about it in a subsequent issue. I missed seeing the Siberian Cranes but the masses of Barheaded Geese were a great sight. I also enjoyed watching a Whitetailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* for a long time. It gives the impression of being totally unconcerned with what is happening in its immediate surroundings, but while looking nonchalantly the other way, strikes at a prey under its neck to great effect.

The Problem of Spelling Common Names of Birds

The common names of birds are being spelt in many ways. One simple solution seems to be to avoid the use of capital letters. Thus redvented bulbul, house crow, house sparrow, great Indian bustard. On the other hand, the practice so far has been to use capitals, thus Redvented Bulbul, House Crow, House Sparrow, Great Indian Bustard. Since there is no dispute about the manner of writing the scientific name of the bird, we need not be too particular about the way the common English name is written. I would welcome some comments on the importance or otherwise of capitals in the common names of birds.

Information on Birds of Periyar - An Appeal by Andrew Robertson

I am sure some of our readers will respond to Robertson's letter in this issue. Write to Joseph Karoor at Thekkady, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary, or to the author in England.

REFLECTIONS ON A MONTH AT THEKKADY

ANDREW ROBERTSON, 2 St. Georges Terrace, Blockley, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucester GL56 9BN, England

As dusk turned to night a brown fish owl dropped out of a dense leafy tree on the opposite bank of the river and its dark shape floated silently downstream to settle on a stout bough above a run of calm water. There was a pleasant night in prospect for both of us I thought; the owl expertly hunting fish or crabs up and down the rocks between the steep wooded banks, and I settled into camp on a sandbank with a good supply of firewood and coffee, and a warm selfish satisfaction of having left my fellow man at least 10 kms back down the track.

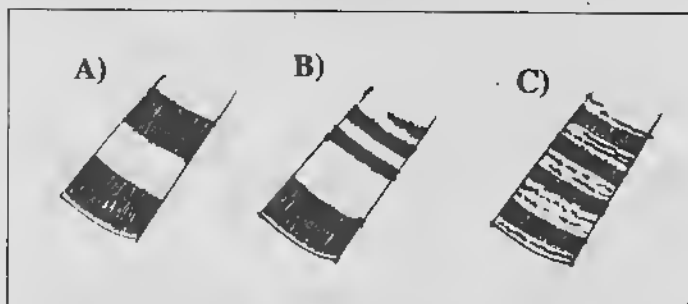
We were both to be disappointed, for I'm sure the owl went hungry that night. Heavy rain higher up the valley soon turned the clear muttering river into a dark churning frenzy of water and by midnight both rocks and sandbank were several feet under water. Only the foaming river and the leeches were active that night and when at last a pale, mist-curtained dawn broke it was clear that my objective, the thick evergreen forest that blankets the upper reaches of the Periyar river, was inaccessibly cut off on the opposite bank. Dispirited, I retraced the route back to thekkady through the head-high, sodden grass, tripping over innumerable coveys of painted bush quail as they exploded off the track. On reflection, in a full month of bird-watching one must expect a setback or two.

A month may seem like a long time to do nothing but birdwatch, but it proved to be utterly absorbing. I was glad that I had decided to concentrate on a single area, the Periyar sanctuary and its surroundings, for as the days progressed, hugging binoculars from dawn to dusk, the eye became increasingly adept at distinguishing the brief flash of colour, the vague outline against the light, and the ear rapidly attuned to calls that could never have been assimilated in just a few days.

Knowing that in this limited area only a certain number of species could be seen (in the end it totaled 177) it was much easier to do my homework on the more unusual and difficult birds that might occur. This preparation proved invaluable for identification in the field of species I was unfamiliar with. A few days spent in a library making additions and annotations to a copy of Salim Ali's "Birds of Kerala" (now sadly in need of a 3rd edition) allowed me to carry a single field guide, yet one which much more usefully reflected both my own areas of ignorance and my interests. For example, the tail pattern of the Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* is quite variable, a fact that is not always

made clear in field guides and can lead to horribly frustrating confusion in the field. The following short note and sketch stuck into the relevant page of "Birds of Kerala" saved a lot of trouble in distinguishing what was, and just as importantly what was not, a Crested Honey Buzzard.

"Banding of tail inconsistent. Either A) 2 wide dark bars, evenly spaced; or B) an unevenly spaced broad sub-terminal bar with 2, or sometimes 3, narrower bands towards the base. Young birds may have C) the tail banded with 4 narrow bars interspersed with wavy rays."



For quick reference while birds were in view I also made up some simple keys for certain groups, such as the swifts, swallows and martins, including all those species that there was any likelihood of seeing:

White	Tail	Other	
NONE	Very long, deeply forked	13cm	= Palm Swift
NONE	short & forked	12cm	= Edible Nest Swiftlet
NONE	short & square	13cm	= Dusky Crag Martin
pale below	white spots		
NONE	short & square	14cm	= Crag Martin
v.pale below	white spots		
NONE	short & forked	RED forehead	
v.pale below	white spots	chin, breast	= House Swallow
		13cm	
RUMP, under tail coverts	square with spines	11cm	= Whiterumped Spinetail
RUMP & throat	short, squarish	15cm	= House Swift
RUMP, throat chin	longish, deeply forked	18cm	= Large Whiterumped Swift
RUMP and all underparts	short, forked	15cm	= House Martin
underparts only	short, forked	brown breast band, 22cm	= Alpine Swift
vent & under tail coverts, fore headspot	square with spines	23cm	= Brownthroated Spinetail
fulvous white breast & below	very long & forked	RED chin and forehead, 14cm	= Swallow
fulvous white from chin down	long, forked	RED rump & nape, 15cm	= Striated Swallow

All the birds at Periyar were fairly unusual to me and I was hoping to see one new or interesting species each day. In this I was more or less successful, largely owing to luck, and some details of these is perhaps the best measure of the diversity and fascination of Periyar.

Nov.12- a single Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*, at c.4000ft., soaring over the large patch of heavy forest above Sabarimala. Its short and very rounded wings are distinctly pinched in at the base and combined with a long straight tail give it the classic profile of a forest-dwelling raptor. Two years previously I had seen and photographed a pair in the Ashambu Hills indulging in what I took to be display flight; the white feathers of the tail coverts were dramatically fluffed out to the sides, appearing like two patches of cotton wool attached to the base of the tail. This white area was so large and plainly visible with the naked eye that it must have constituted more than what is usually described as white tips to the upper tail coverts.

Nov.13-Goldfronted Leaf Bird *Chloropsis aurifrons* and Jerdon's or Goldmantled Leaf Bird *Chloropsis cochinchinensis*. In practice I found these very similar species hard to separate in the field throughout my visit, not least because of the sore neck produced from trying to follow them in their preferred habitat in the top canopy of tall trees! The difficulty is compounded in south India by a degree of confusion in their illustration. Unlike the typical blue-chinned race of *C.aurifrons* illustrated in the Pictorial Guide, the Handbook, Baker & Inglis and elsewhere, the southern race *frontalis* has the chin black, in both sexes. In this chin and throat area it is therefore very close in appearance to *C.cochinchinensis*, and one has to rely on judgment of the extent and tint of the gold areas to distinguish them.

Nov.14- Loten's Sunbird *Nectarinia lotenia*, among lantana scrub at Thekkady. Although superficially like a purple sunbird, once the much greater length of its bill has been appreciated there is no mistaking this little gem. However, you need to get a good close look at it to appreciate the bright metallic pinkish purple necklace and the dull brown underparts that also distinguish it from the purple sunbird. I found the two species equally common and often feeding together making comparison relatively simple.

Nov. 17- Large Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Ali doesn't list this species in "Birds of Kerala" but it is very obviously present on the Periyar lake where I saw up to 13 birds in a single day. There were several young birds with varying degrees of white on the underparts. Cormorants are said to breed at Kumarakom, not far from Kottayam, though they have never been recorded nesting at Periyar lake.

Nov.18- However erratic the service, waiting for the bus at Periyar House was always interesting because of the Flowerpeckers that gathered in the clumps of *Loranthus* in the surrounding trees. Being not too high up they afforded good views and using the bill colour and shape as a diagnostic clue, I was soon able to distinguish the three resident species.

Nov.19- A visit to the foot of the eastern ghat in Tamil Nadu, about 1300ft lower than Thekkady, produced a list of ten species which were not seen on the Kerala side, emphasising the sanctity of this ecological divide for many birds.

Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Baybacked Shrike	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>
Blue Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>
Small Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Purplerumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
Common Wood Shrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>
Brownheaded Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
Whitebrowed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>

Nov.20- Because they are said to be shy and skulking it was a privilege to be entertained for 15 minutes by the antics of a flock of 26 Wynaad Laughing Thrushes *Garrulax delesserti* as they noisily cavorted through a patch of semi-evergreen forest.

Nov.21- In view of Ali's comments I was delighted to find a Redwinged Crested Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus* moving with a mixed hunting party through the forest at Thekkady. Twice over the next few days I saw it again in the same general area and presumed it to be the same individual.

Nov.22- Redbreasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa parva*. A single female in trees in open grassland about 400m inland from the Edapalayam Rest House. In addition to Ali's two sightings it has been recorded from Periyar by S.A. Yahya and twice from Vandiperiyar by Michael Jackson, but must still be classified as rare here.

Nov.23- Among the specialized inhabitants of the grassy hilltops I had hoped to find the Nilgiri Pipit *Anthus nilghiriensis* but it eluded me. However the Brown Rock Pipit *Anthus similis* was there, along with Small Skylark *Alauda gulgula* and Streaked Fantail Warbler *Cisticola juncidis*.

Nov.24- While breakfasting on the Rest House verandah at Edapalayam a Thickbilled Warbler *Acrocephalus aedon* clambered up through the shrubbery and into the low branches of a tree, allowing a close and leisurely examination of this normally secretive species. It

gave a repeat performance the next morning. The call is very like that of Blyth's Reed Warbler but commensurately louder and bigger as befits the larger bird.

Nov.25 – The Whitebellied Blue Flycatcher *Muscicapa pallipes* attracted me especially with its inquisitive, confiding nature. This pair responded when I was trying to call up thrushes in thick undergrowth and the male in particular was fascinated and hung around within six or seven feet. On another occasion while walking down from Mangaladevi at dusk I came across a pair sitting on fallen branches at the very edge of the track through the forest. They were slowly fanning and cocking their tails and calling almost inaudibly back and forth with affectionate coos and trills; this may sound anthropomorphic but I cannot describe it more accurately.

Nov.26 – The hilltop at the Mangaladevi temple is a wonderful spot for Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* and Blackwinged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*. Neither are rare birds but anyone interested in bird photography could look a long way before finding anywhere better than this.

Nov.28 – Any idea that you need to go a long way and work hard to find unusual birds was dispelled when, with the sleep hardly out of my eyes I was confronted in the early morning by a Malay Bittern *Gorsachius melanolophus* emerging cautiously from the undergrowth next to Periyar House.

Nov.29 – The Spotted Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps* is one of those species, as is the Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*, much more often heard at Periyar at this time of year. It is well worth memorising the calls for the birds themselves become much easier to see when you are forewarned of their presence. This morning I was able to watch a spotted babbler at close range in the undergrowth busy demolishing a very large moth.

Nov.30 – A pair of Brown Fish Owls *Bubo zeylonensis* make their home on the lowest stretch of the Periyar river near Thanikudy, where I found them quite active during the day. The white patch on the front of the neck is distinctive and easily visible with binoculars at 200m or more.

Dec.1 – At last I saw my first Drongo-Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris*, and having done so I would have to disagree with those who say it is confusable with an ordinary drongo. The thin white bars on the tail, on this individual at least, were unmistakable and quite boldly marked. The aspect of the head is also different from that of a drongo, with the bill thinner, particularly at the base.

Dec.2 – Harriers confuse me. This one, patrolling slowly up and across a small valley of thick grass tussocks and

stunted palms above Thanikudy, could be a young Pale Harrier. I have left my camera behind and so, without the possibility of a second opinion, it is reluctantly scratched from the list.

Dec.3 – The Southern Greybacked Shrike *Lanius schach* is not uncommon in the High Range and Palni Hills but published records indicate it is very rare in this area. The fact that the single bird sitting in a small tree on the edge of a patch of seepage grass near Mlapara today is the only one I shall see appears to confirm its rarity here.

Dec.4 – The Brownbreasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui* may have been under-reported from Periyar in the past, probably through being confused with the Brown Flycatcher *M.latirostris*. Close inspection shows that it is really quite easily distinguished, for it has distinctly yellow legs, a bright white throat with pale moustachal streaks and there is a clear divide between its brown breast and whitish underparts. So far I have seen 3 specimens. I find the Rufoustailed Flycatcher *M.ruficauda* harder to identify with certainty though it lacks the white eye ring and throat, and is generally paler below than the Brown Flycatcher. The amount of rufous in the tail seems to vary considerably.

Dec.5 – A large flock of Brownthroated Spinetail Swifts *Chaetura gigantea*, at least 100 birds, come in the evening to drink from the channel near the Thekkady Head Works. Each time the flock approaches the water, the birds manoeuvring for position on the final run in, what sounds like the clapping of wings can be heard, as if they are actually hitting each other as they jostle. They hardly slacken their normal fantastic speed for while they circle for another approach the sound of their movement through the air is clearly audible.

Dec.6 – The birds of prey draw me back to Mangaladevi again and I am rewarded by the sight of a pair of Bonelli's Eagles *Hieraaetus fasciatus* circling up from the Tamil Nadu plains on the morning thermals. Once they have attained the height of the temple (c.4500ft.) they head out on an even glide across the plains towards Gudalur until lost to sight.

Dec.7 – My most unexpected sighting was once again at Thekkady, while standing on the road near the DFO's office. Some Scarlet and Small Minivets in a mixed hunting party are joined briefly by a single Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus*. It is soon chased off by a Racket-tailed Drongo but, in spite of its great rarity in India, there is no doubt of its identity.

Dec.8 – As the visit draws to a close a bird I had been keeping a particular look-out for suddenly makes a brief appearance. While sitting watching snipes on boggy grassland not far from Kumili a Rufousbellied Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus kienerii* comes gliding low along the edge of the

forest. The black head and face, contrasting strongly with the white of the chin, throat and breast, in turn sharply divided from the rusty-coloured underparts make it immediately recognisable, even though this is the first time I have seen it.

Dec.9—How can I leave out the Leaf Warblers? All those listed by Ali in "Birds of Kerala" are certainly present here, and I agree with him that there are undoubtedly more. The Greenish Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* easily outnumbered all the others put together around Thekkady but the higher hill sholas probably hold surprises for anyone with the necessary expertise.

There are probably very few species out of the 250 or so recorded for Periyar that cannot at one time or another be seen within the Tourist Zone. However, anyone planning a visit should be aware that some places, such as Mangaladevi, require special permission to visit, and in the case of those outside the Tourist Zone this can currently

only be granted through the Chief Conservator Wildlife in Trivandrum. For foreigners in particular this is a tedious and time-consuming process that needs to be initiated well in advance of your intended visit. In retrospect it is hardly worth the trouble. Careful observation within walking distance of Thekkady will almost certainly produce enough of interest to satisfy all but the most fanatical twitcher.

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BIRD COUNT ACROSS A LAGOON IN KUTCH

JUGAL KISHOR TIWARY, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Bombay 400023

It was a fine morning on the 8th February, the sky was partially obscured and gentle breeze was blowing. I was doing a bird count in Dhand.

Dhand is a lagoon spread over 14 km² area near Phuli-Chhari village of Kutch district, Gujarat.

The Chhari Dhand is an ideal abode of thousands of distant feathered friends, an important wintering ground for land birds too.

I took the air-filled rear tube of a tractor made in the shape of a boat, enough to sail on waves for one person. I kept my field guides, notebook, pen, binoculars; pulled off my shoes, and kept the watch and purse in the Jeep. I told my colleague that I will come back to the camp within 3-4 hours after finishing the bird count.

It was 8 hrs in the morning, I started scanning the water surface. Sailing on the tube, after about 10 minutes I saw five Avocets (wading birds with long up-curved bills). One after the other I was finding birds, Greater Blackheaded Gulls, Large Egrets, Brownheaded Gulls, Pintails, Common Teals, Grey Herons, Herring Gulls, Grey Wagtails, Common Cranes, White Storks, River Terns, Coots, and Great Reed Warblers. I noted every sighting in my field notebook. Overall 35 species in good numbers were sighted.

I was in the middle of the Dhand too tired to propel the tube in water which was about 4 feet deep. I walked in the water for about an hour looking around for birds. At a distance I saw about 8000 ducks, most of them were Pintails, Common Teals, and Garganeys. I saw a few fishermen in the Dhand taking out Rhau from the nets. Many times diving birds such as Coots and Grebes get entangled in the fishermen's nets, and they sometimes sell the live birds in the market. I checked their bags, no birds were there. I asked them which side is close to land. I started walking in the water. By this time, I was feeling very unpleasant. My skin was burning. Perhaps the hyper saline water was causing itching on my legs and hands. It was 11 O'clock, the sun was fairly hot, I saw a reedy bank close to me. It took 20 minutes to reach near the reeds. There was no sign of land, a vast expanse of water was again in front of me to cross. I could not turn back, because I had to walk about 3 km in water to reach the starting point. I made up my mind to move ahead to complete the bird count and also in the hope that I could get close to the land. I reached in between the reeds. About 8 Great Reed Warblers welcomed me. With about 7 kg heavy inflated tube on my shoulders, walking in the reeds without shoes, was very painful. I found Harriers roosting spots, because the reeds were bent down, a few droppings and loose feathers indicated that a good number of Marsh and Pale Harriers common in the area roost here.

I walked in the reed for about 45 minutes. Now I knew that I had lost my bearings in the Dhand. I reached near a *Salvadora* tree, standing in shallow water, as I reached close, a snake bird flew making a harsh noise as if cursing me for disturbing the sweet sleep in the hot afternoon. I climbed up the tree, scanned the area, with great hopes. I was near to the ground. It was about a half km far from the tree. I started walking fast towards the land. From a little boggy site a few fantail snipe flew suddenly with noise flutterings. As the tube was heavy to carry on, I took half its air out wading in shallow water among the reeds. I came to an open area, the depth of water was increasing here. Thank God, half of the air was there in the tube. I sat on the tube and crossed the channel about 40 m wide. Finally I reached the hard substratum. I put off my wet clothes and sat for a while to take rest.

It was 12.30 the Sun was over the head. I looked around for my tent. There was no sign of familiar land marks. I was feeling very thirsty. The Dhand water was too brackish to drink. I was walking through the *Prosopis* forest and

walking on hot sand without shoes was very painful.

Some bird moved in a *Caparis* bush. I focused my binoculars on the bird. It was equal in size to a bulbul with black on the lores extending till the nape; wing primaries were marked black, with white tips. It was grey on the back. I referred to my Field guide, it was a *Hypocolius* male bird, *Hypocolius ampelinus*, a rare bird in the Kutch area. I confirmed my sighting by a close approach to the bird.

It was 2 O'clock. I scanned the area. A few hazy figures appeared. It was a village. After about 15 minutes walk, I reached near the village mosque. Sat there, had some water. The Molvi came out. I asked him which village is this? He told me it is Tal village. He asked details about our work. I knew from him that I was 8 km away from my village Phulai. I took a bus from the village Tal to Chhari Phulai, came to our camp. Later I developed an allergic symptom, rashes on the skin, my right foot sole was pierced with spines, but I was happy enough to finish my objective and had a most rewarding bird-watching day.

OCCURRENCE OF SOME RARE MIGRANTS IN CANNANORE, KERALA

C. SASHIKUMAR, 9 Subash Nagar, Cannanore 670002

Study of birds, for nearly a decade, in the wetlands around Cannanore, has revealed the presence of several migratory species rare to Kerala. Most of the observations were carried out at the following two places.

- i) MATAKKARA (11°57'N, 75°22'E). The extensive tidal mudflats where Taliparamba river meets the stronger current of the Valarapattanam river before they force their way together to the Lakshadweep sea at Azhikkal estuary about 1/2 km downstream.
- ii) KATTAMPALLY (11°55'N, 75°20'E). A wetland formed by a branch of the Valarapattanam river, which extends from about 5 km upstream of the estuary to about 15 km southeast. The area contains reedbeds, paddy fields and large stretches of water covered with aquatic vegetation in several places. A regulator-cum-roadbridge was constructed here in 1966 for the purpose of preventing saline water from entering paddy fields - the benefits of which are highly controversial - and due to this there is no tidal effect at present, though the water is still saline. (Analysis of sample taken on 17 November, 1986 shows chlorides 4250 P.P.M. pH 6.5).

Details regarding sightings, behaviour, etc. are discussed below:

1. Pintail *Anas acuta*

Pintail ducks were first reported from Kerala in 1981 (Neelakantan, K.K., 1982). At Kattampally, 3000+ Pintails were first spotted on 7 February, 1982 and after that these birds were found in thousands every year, along with Lesser Whistling Teals *Dendrocygna javanica*, Garganey, *Anas querquedula* and Coot *Fulica atra* also in small numbers, from November to March. 6000+ Pintails - about 60% of them males - were observed on 15 January, 1989 during the waterfowl count.

2. Spotbill Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha*

Four Spotbill Ducks were spotted at the Matakara mudflats on 20 September, 1987 and the same number was observed again on 31 October, 1987. As many as 32 of this species were found at the same place on 16 October, 1988; such a high number of Spotbills has never been reported from Kerala before (Neelakantan, K.K. Pers. Comm.). Most of the birds of this group were resting on the mud flat, some tucking their heads inside the wings, while others were preening. As the tide rose, the birds were found floating in the water forming a small 'raft'.

3. Oyster Catcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

A solitary Oyster Catcher was sighted in Matakara on 27 February, 1986. Further observations in the subsequent years proved that this species is regular winter visitor to these mudflats from September (20 September, 1987 the earliest) to April (24 April, 1986 the latest). 14 Oyster Catchers were seen on 24 November, 1986 which remains

the highest congregation observed. All the birds observed from November to April were adults in non-breeding plumage; i.e. with white neck collar.

4. Blackwinged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

After sighting the first few birds on 22 February, 1981 this species has been found regularly at Kattampally from October to April, every subsequent year. The largest number observed was twenty on 14 October, 1987.

5. Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

An Avocet was spotted at Matakara on 23 November, 1987. It was an adult bird and proved to be very wary during the observation for about 2 hrs.

6. Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*

This rare winter visitor to Kerala was first reported 29 km north of Trivandrum (Neelakantan et al, 1980). On 16 October, 1988 two Crab Plovers made their appearance at Matakara. Contrasting black and white plumage and white head showed them to be adults. They were not at all shy, contrary to recorded behaviour (Salim Ali, 1983) and permitted to approach within 10 ft. When ventured closer they became alert and uttered low pitched kreek-kreek - a softer version of tern's call-several times, looking in the direction of the intruder; mincing steps. Both of them were observed to consume a number of crabs, available abundantly on the mudflats, caught after chasing. Smaller crabs were swallowed whole and larger ones eaten after beating several times on the ground by gripping in their beak. These birds were last seen at this place on 8 November, 1988.

7. Eastern Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*

Three Eastern Knots were identified on 28 November, 1986, feeding on the Matakara mudflats among a group of Dunlins *Calidris alpinus*, Curlew Sandpiper *culidris Testacea*, Terek Sandpiper *Tringa terek*, Little Stints *Calidris Minuta*, etc. Stocky in appearance and faster in movements, these birds were conspicuously larger among other waders. Weak wing bars and pale rump were noticeable in flight. This species had not been included in Salim Ali's Birds of Kerala (Oxford, 1984 Reprint).

8. Broadbilled Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

Described as apparently rare in Kerala (Salim Ali, 1969), the Broadbilled Sandpiper was spotted at Matakara on 30 September 1987. The distinctive double supercilia, buff streaked flanks and long beak slightly down curved at the tip revealed their identity. Seventeen (17) birds were observed, feeding on the mudflats. Again on 31 October 1987 six birds were seen resting on a bund at a high tide in a mixed flock of Stints, Terek Sandpipers, Curlew Sandpipers, Kentish Plovers, etc.

9. Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Known to be a common winter visitor to coastal Pakistan (S. Ali & Ripley, 1983) and though there were

several sightings in Gujarat Coast (Taej Mundkur, 1987) and a ring recovery in Kerala (Ambedkar, 1985), Sandwich Terns have not been widely reported from the west coast of India. Ten birds of this species were identified among a group of gulls and terns on 28 March, 1986 at Matakara. Four were seen at Kattampally on 26 July, 1986 and two again at the same place on 1 August, 1986. These birds were in winter plumage and probably were juveniles over-wintering here. The only species of Tern recorded at Kattampally - from 1981 onwards - in winter was the Indian Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*; most of which assume summer plumage by April and have never been recorded from May to August. On 1 May, 1987, 25 Sandwich Terns were found resting on the mudflats of Matakara.

Conclusion

These records show that, the above mentioned species of birds, though reported rarely, do occur along the coastline of Kerala in winter. The rarity may be attributed to the low number of knowledgeable bird watchers in the State.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Shri K.K. Neelakantan for his valuable suggestions and encouragement. Thanks are also due to Mr. C. Jayakumar (now Education Officer, W.W.F.-I - Kerala State Committee) whose company and knowledge in ornithology were of great help in many field-strips.

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BIRDS OF TOKYO, JAPAN

A.K. CHAKRAVARTHY** and SUGIHIKO HOSHIZAKI*

**R R S, Mudigere 577 132, Karnataka

*Post-graduate Student, Department of Entomology, University of Tokyo

During November 1989, four outings were made in Tokyo, Japan. The temperature fluctuated between 15 and 9° and day length between 9 to 10 hr. Most days were cloudy with breezy cold winds blowing and intermittent rains. No tree was in bloom excepting for the fruits of Gingko, *Gingko biloba*. Other common trees encountered in the University of Tokyo campus and Tokyo wildlife park were *Cedrus deodara*, *Mallotus integra*, *Cinnamomum camphora*, *Zelkova serrata* and *Platanus orientalis*.

In Ueno Zoo and Port wildlife park more than 20 species of birds were sighted that included wagtails, teals, ducks, geese, pochards, harriers, kites, kestrel, smew, moorhens,

gulls and terns. In all about 530 species are found in Japan, about 25% of that found in India. Birdwatching in India and Japan and our discussion gave us an impression that many species found in Japan had their relatives in India and many birds that visit Japan also visit China. A comparative study of avifaunas in the three and neighbouring countries could be interesting and worthwhile. In the zoo and sanctuary, telescope, binoculars and guides are available and no one is allowed to have a direct approach to the bird spots in Japan. Books and sketches of birds and maps are made available to the visitors. These are some of the actions the authorities in India can well implement.

Information on birds sighted are given below

Species	Status	Numbers	Remarks
<i>Hypsipetes amaurotis</i>	M	5-6/group	Noisy birds. Most common in the campus. Feed on orange, apple, cherries, etc. as also on flower-buds and fruits of road side trees.
<i>Zosterops japonica</i>	R	2-3/flock	In summer, usually found singly. Prefers orange juice, nectar, etc.
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	R	>100S	Gregarious. Plenty at Ueno Zoo. Very few in Tokyo Wild life Park. Nest gregariously. Breeding grounds are very small and few.
<i>Phoenicurus aureus</i>	M	Singly	Breeds in China, Formosa. Spends winter in Japan.
<i>Turdus naumanni</i>	M	2-3	Feeds on soil arthropods by hop. Also feed on persimmons, orange, apple, etc.
<i>Carduelis sinica</i>	R	Singly	Breeds in low lying lands. Seed-eating birds. Prefers Brassica, sunflower wild-grass seeds
<i>Sturnus cineraceus</i>	LM	Singly	A common bird throughout Tokyo. Predominantly frugivorous but also feed on animal matter especially earthworms.
<i>Passer montanus</i>	R	10-12	Gregarious. Small parties found in cultivated fields, human dwellings, refuse dumps, rice fields, etc. Prefers rice for feeding.
<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	R	10-15	Common in Tokyo. Numbers are increasing.
<i>Columba livia</i>	R	5-6	Common, nuisance bird. Numbers are increasing
<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	R	Singly	Common
<i>Parus major</i>		LM 2-3	Nests during May-June and August.

M = Migratory

R = Resident

LM = Local Migratory

A RECORD FLOCK OF WHITE STORKS SIGHTED IN KARNATAKA

S.Sridhar, No 10, Sirur Park B Street, Seshadripuram, Bangalore 560 020

A record flock of 85 White Storks was sighted by birdwatchers and Forest Department officials in a tank 35km North-east of Bangalore, during the Asian Mid - Winter Waterfowl Census on 17th January 1990. This is the first time in the State of Karnataka that a large number of White Storks are counted in one flock. The previous record for the region was around 20 White Storks sighted years ago by Dr. Salim Ali. The Forest Department arranged to post a guard at this tank to ensure the safety of these storks during their short stay.

During the January 1989 census covering 650 wetlands, only 748 White Storks were counted in the entire country including 17 counted in Karnataka. It is heartening to know that this year, a single flock of 85 White Storks have come to this tank in Karnataka from Europe braving all hazards.

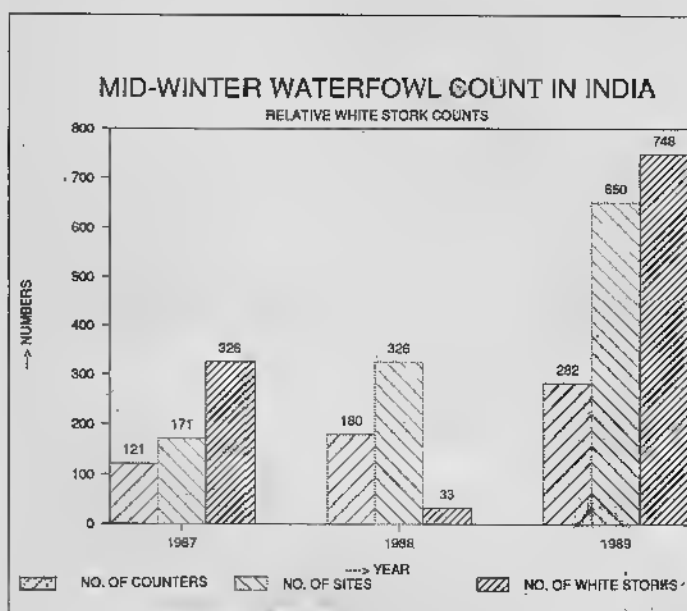
The *White Storks* *Ciconia ciconia* of *Ciconiidae* family, breed in northern and central Europe and during winter cross into Africa over the narrow strait of Gibraltar, or through the middle east. Few small groups of White Storks also migrate to India through Afghanistan and Pakistan, choosing a route to avoid long and hazardous sea crossings.

Early on 17th January 1990, we sighted several White Storks flying towards the shallow tank, to join many more White Storks feeding at the tank. The small group of bird watchers and Forest officials were filled with a sense of wonder and admiration for the spectacular White Storks with prominent red beak and black and white wings, spanning a full five feet. They are also expert gliders. The White Storks use the thermal air currents for their inter-continental journeys between breeding grounds in Europe and wintering grounds, in Africa or Asia. The birds spiral slowly upwards in the rising column of warm air, and once at the top of the column they set their wings for gliding in the desired direction and off they go for around forty kilometers at a time without moving a feather.

In Karnataka, the White Stork is a rare winter visitor seen in small numbers around ponds, marshes and wetlands feeding on frogs, grasshoppers and other orthopteran insects. Drainage and development projects coupled with the wide spread drought across the country have affected many wetlands which are the main feeding grounds for the White Storks. Birdwatchers from Bangalore have collected bird data from 35 tanks during 1988, 97 tanks during 1989 and more than 110 tanks during 1990.

The Asian Mid-winter Waterfowl Census has provided an opportunity to the birdwatchers, to keep constant vigil

on bird populations and their fluctuations in different areas. The individual count forms sent by the counters are processed at IWRB, Slimbridge and a consolidated report is sent to all the counters every year. This enables the conservationists to identify areas of bird interest in the country. As rapid and incessant developments are bringing a change in the environment across the country, it is important to monitor, visualise and forecast the emerging pattern and trends in the migration of birds such as the White Stork.



Migratory Routes of White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)

CORRESPONDENCE

C. PERENNOU REPLIES FROM IWRB,
Sturbridge, Gloucester G127 Bx United Kingdom

Thank you very much for your News letter for Birdwatchers (November / December 1989 Vol XXIX No 11 & 12), and Mr. Sridhar's note pinpointing the printer's error in the *Report of the Asian Waterfowl Census 1989*, about the storks - we had realised this only after mailing the report.

Please find hereunder the errata to be added to each report, which also relates to another printing error:-

In table 2, page 35, the totals for Woolly-necked Stork, White Stork, Black-necked Stork, Lesser Adjutant and Greater Adjutant in Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka and Kerala should read as follows :

	Gujarat	Haryana	H.P.	J. & K	Karnataka	Kerala
Woolly-necked Stock	29	18	-	-	218	-
White Stork	726	2	-	-	17	3
Black-necked Stork	2	7	-	-	4	-
Lesser Adjutant	-	-	-	-	5	-
Greater Adjutant	-	-	-	-	-	-

In summary Table 4, page 82 and 83, the last three columns of the shorebird totals have been moved downwards by one line.

Your team's work in January 1989 was great ! We do hope you have been able to reoperate it in 1990. It is fully acknowledged in an article in the last issue of IWRB News.

Was 1990 a good year for White Storks in Karnataka ? From the three winters I spent in Pondichere region from 1986 to 1989, I only found that in 1986-87 large numbers (up to 340) came to this region.

With all our best regards and congratulations for your work.

Yours Sincerely,
C. Perennou
Scientific Officer, IWRB.

AN APPEAL FOR INFORMATION ON PERIYAR BIRDS. ANDREW ROBERTSON, 2 St. Georges Terrace, Blockley, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos. GL 56 9BN England

Thank you for your note of January 16th. The current issue of the Newsletter was forwarded very promptly from Bangalore and I look forward to receiving some back numbers shortly. A couple of years ago I was fortunate to

find nearly 10 years worth of very early Newsletters in a secondhand bookshop in Bombay and have found them full of useful odds and ends.

As promised (or should it be threatened!) I am enclosing an article about Periyar for your consideration. It is of a very general nature but some of your less expert readers may find something of interest in it. The sighting of the Ashy Minivet has of course been reported to BNHS and hopefully they will accept it, since there was no doubt at all in my mind that the identification is correct. On the other hand, I am not absolutely convinced of the identification of the Crested Goshawk; it is only the second time I have seen it and, in spite of the photos, it may have been misidentified the first time. Those white tail feathers are quite extraordinary and I can find no mention of them in the literature either for Crested Goshawk or Besra, the other possibility. Perhaps you know these species better ? I have enclosed copies of the two slides and a note written at the time and if you have any doubts as to the bird's identity will you please edit out the relevant section in the article.

I must admit to something of an ulterior motive in submitting an article on Periyar - I have been researching the birds here for some time and have reached the stage where a checklist and booklet is being contemplated for publication. This may be undertaken in conjunction with the Oriental Bird Club, several members of which have helped in the compilation of records, notable Michael Jackson, who was for 30 years a tea planter at Vandiperiyar. There may be readers of the Newsletter who could contribute recent records, or birdwatchers in the Palnis who go over to Periyar periodically ? More importantly, for some time I have been trying to find a competent local birdwatcher who will undertake periodic visits to the sanctuary, particularly in the months between June and Sept., to try to ascertain some basic facts that are currently lacking. One of the Forest Officers at Thekkady, Joseph Karoor, has been helping me in this but so far we have not found anyone sufficiently expert whose identifications can be thoroughly relied on. Perhaps you know of someone, a student perhaps, who might fit the bill ? There is about Rs.2,000/- being held at Thekkady to pay such a researcher's expenses.

The sort of questions that need to be answered are :

Large and Little Cormorants - in what months are they present and where do they nest ?

Pond Heron - I have no records for June, July and August; are they present ?

Do Pond Herons and Egrets roost overnight in the sanctuary on a regular basis ?

Black and Brahminy Kites - we need more information on their status and movements in and around the sanctuary.

White-eyed Buzzard Eagle - there is a single record for the sanctuary which requires confirmation.

Vultures - in the past they seem to have been quite common, certainly more so than today. Why is this? And where do the King Vultures roost and breed; in the Palnis?

Osprey - have been recorded in all months except June and July; do young birds ever stay throughout the year?

Quails - rare and sporadic records do not reflect the true situation; we very much need to know more.

Swifts - where do these birds roost and breed?

Greyheaded and Black-and-Orange Flycatcher - Why are these two species so rare here? Is it too low an altitude for them?

I'm sure you get the picture. Of course there is lots more it would be nice to know, e.g. breeding records and the true status of some of the local migrants, and some of this might be clarified incidentally. Can you suggest someone? They would have to have access to a pair of good binoculars but I think Joseph can help here, and he has the relevant field guides for reference.

I would be very grateful if you can put me in touch with anyone, or place an appeal in the Newsletter. Forgive me if this is too much of an imposition. Please write directly to Joseph Karoor at Thekkady if this is more convenient.

Many thanks for your help.

ASSOCIATION BETWEEN A POND HERON AND A SHEEP. H. DANIEL WESLEY, 126, Ramalinga Nagar South, Tiruchirapalli 620017.

On 22 January 1990, a pond heron and a grown-up sheep whose pelage was brown-and-white, much like that of the bird's plumage, were together, the former close at the heels of the latter in the grassy fallowland by my window. The sheep licked the bird from crown down and the bird seemed to appreciate the gesture, adjusting its head accordingly. It lasted for about five minutes till the bird was disturbed by human activities. This kind of association between pond heron and an ungulate has not been known earlier.

DETERIORATING LALBAGH. N.R. SWAMY, 131, Surveyor Street, Bangalore 560004

On 2nd January 1990, Tuesday Hemant and I planned to count the waterbirds found in the Lalbagh lake. We went there at 4 p.m. What we found was surprising. There was not even a single waterbird to be seen to the side towards

the interior of Lalbagh. The total number of Dabchicks found in the entire lake was less than 5. We counted 104 common teals and Garganeys, 27 pond herons, 8 egrets, 21 coots, 9 purple moorhens, 1 waterhen, and 1 purple heron. Totally there were 176. When I went there first time in winter with my friend P.A. Ullas, we had counted many more. The water was almost black in colour. The teals could be found in one small patch of water. Most part of the lake was either polluted or covered by weeds. This pollution of water and the spreading of the weeds should be checked. Otherwise it will spread to other lakes and tanks.

COMMUNAL BATHING IN BIRDS.
H.S.A.YAHYA, Centre of Wildlife and Ornithology,
A.M.U., Aligarh 202001

Many birds enjoy bathing; some take water-bath, some sand-bath still some others take sun-bath. It is a common sight for any bird watcher to see several birds taking a bath in natural tree holes or in depressions in the ground after rain. Some birds regularly visit rivers or ponds for this purpose, others are opportunistic - bathing only when water is available at hand. I have described bathing behaviour of barbets and some other birds somewhere else (Yahya 1980, 1989).

On 30th November 1989 I was birding with Frank Oatman and others in Corbet National Park. At 11.30 a.m. at Sultan Guest House we observed a very interesting phenomenon of communal bathing in a small water tank kept on the ground. Though it was a clear bright sunny day, it was quite cold under thick shade of tall Sal trees - yet birds were enjoying the bath. The following seven species took a bath within 15 minutes:

Redvented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i> - 3
Whitebrowed	
Fantail Flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i> - 4
Yellowbellied Fantail	
Flycatcher	<i>R. hypoxantha</i> - 3
Greyheaded Flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i> - 3
White Eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i> - 5
Grey Tit	<i>Parus major</i> - 4
Pallass's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i> - 4

The birds visited the pool one by one and took a thorough bath and preened alternately. While bathing the birds were largely peaceful except once the White Eye chased a Pallass's Leaf Warbler.

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OPPORTUNISTIC FEEDING BEHAVIOUR BY A DIVERSE GROUP OF BIRDS. RAKESH VYAS, 2-P-22, Vigyan Nagar, Kota 324005

Conspecific feeding is well known in nature as birds and animals of the same species form a group to raid and hunt. This activity has obvious advantages as the prey can be cornered by the group and the food shared by all. Sometime, it is also observed that totally different species take advantage of the situation in which each diverse group is benefited.

I was surveying a lake near Kota on 11th January, 1990 for mid-winter waterfowl census when I observed a curious hunting party of different birds. At about 8.45 a.m. a 150 strong group of shags arrived at the lake. Some of them landed in water and the rest flew away to some other place. A little later 55 Large Cormorants arrived and landed in deeper western corner of the lake. The shags had started raiding the area when they were joined by large cormorants. There was a lot of dust raised as the expression goes and the fish started jumping to escape the raiding party. Immediately a flock of 27 white pelicans joined the fray. The large blackheaded Gulls and Brown-headed Gulls also arrived to join the hunting party.

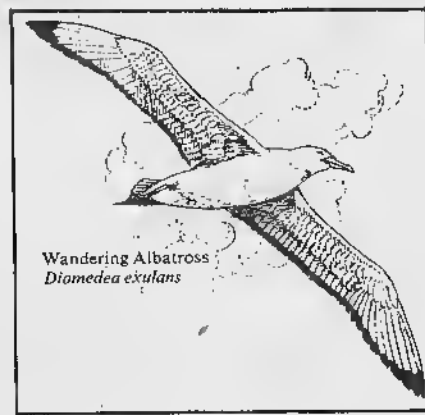
The River terns started the aerial attack on desperate fish. The raiding started in an extended V-formation. The

shags and cormorants dived and brought the fish on the surface. The white pelicans netted a lot of fishes in their pouches. The river terns dived to catch the prize of delicious fish. A different battle ensued in air as Terns chased a Brown-headed Gull which had a large fish in its bill. The Terns were paid back in the same coin as a little later two Brown-headed Gulls were seen chasing off a few terns. Slowly the extended V-formation turned into a narrow V-shape which had pelicans in the middle surrounded by shags, Cormorants and Large Gulls. After about 5-10 minutes in the area the cormorants flew a little distance to a new area of the lake and were keenly followed by Pelicans and Gulls, which also took wing but did not leave the group. All the while Terns followed them in air and created a lot of din. Finally the formation turned into a straight line interspersed with Pelicans, Shags, Large Cormorants and Gulls. The whole operation continued for 45 minutes and the Pelicans moved to a shallower area. The Gulls and Terns returned to ground and a little later Cormorants and Shags also came out of water to dry their wings.

Barring few minor altercations a good village feast was over in which everyone had its share irrespective of its size or position and was contented with the resultant gastronomic delights.

In the first successful satellite tracking of birds, French scientists have used satellites to track ALBATROSSES, the world's largest flying seabirds, to study their ocean wandering habits. The ecologists from the National Centre for Scientific Research at Beauvoir (France) fitted six birds with tiny radio transmitters and tracked their flights across the south west Indian Ocean for three months. The birds covered between 3,600 and 15,000 kilometres in a single foraging trip and daytime flight distances ranged upto 930 kilometres.

TRACKING BIRDS



Source: PTI

Cover Photo : White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*) at the tank where a record flock was sighted (article on page 10.) Photo S.Sridhar

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KARNATAKA - NO ROOM FOR WHITE STORKS ?

Early on 2nd January 1988, two birdwatchers Mr. H.B. Papanna and Mr. P. Karanth, were camping at the Thailur tank for a preliminary survey. Just as they were busy watching seven rare White Storks and collecting data on various other birds at the tank, four persons who had come on two scooters, via the Thailur-Bellur Road were also watching the White Storks. Two rifles were taken out deliberately by them and one of the White Storks was shot in the wing. The poachers ran after the mighty master of the air, now writhing in agony in the paddy fields and overpowered it after a brief melee. The photograph was taken by Mr. H.B. Papanna, as the ill fated stork was being taken away by the poachers. Thus the White Stork's essential voyage for survival, ended abruptly under tragic circumstances. This is not a sporadic event. In fact it was observed that in nearly 40 of the 97 tanks covered in the 1989 census, poaching of migratory ducks and waders is fairly regular. During the January 1990 census our team came across two White Storks, shot dead but not recovered by the poachers. Bundles of twigs used as hides by the poachers for approaching the storks for a closer shot were noticed by the census team around the tanks frequented by Storks, including the tank where the flock of 85 storks were counted. Often the pellet shots do not kill the birds instantaneously. But the birds die a lingering death eventually due to lead poisoning.

Many species of migratory ducks and waders are facing a rough time in recent years. Conservation of large natural feeding areas, is vital to the future of the rare waders such as the White Stork. As far as Karnataka is concerned, the future of this magnificent wading bird is delicately poised, due to recurring drought, encroaching civilization and vicious poaching.

Incidentally, This photograph has been selected by M/s. Hoefer Communications, Singapore for printing posters with the caption 'YOU CAME A LONG WAY - BABY'.

S.Sridhar,



Photo By H.B. Papanna